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Communications.

NEW YORK, June 6, 1899.

To the Editor of THE COLLECTOR AND ART CRITIC.

Dear Sir: How the deuce you writers on the Arts can contrive to ring the changes upon *light* and *shadow*, *chiaroscuro*, *perspective*, *breadth*, *values*, *quality*, and not flag, is past my shallow comprehension—yea “past the good conceit I hold of thee.” This query was floating uppermost in my mind as I was walking—“such summer birds are men,” as blithely singeth Warwickshire Will—through the umbratic glades of our Central Park.

It was a torrid night, and “Care-charmer sleep, son of the Sable Night,” would not relieve my anguish, so up I rose, and “an hour before the worship’d sun peer’d forth the golden window of the east,” I prowled away and sat me down in the freshness of the dawn. What a morn! The bright haze through which I behold the obelisk makes this Pharaoh relic but one of the spires of a thousand celestial palaces in the glories of an atmosphere which is a prism. Palette and maulstick! ‘tis a finer sight than standing on your head and looking at the skies!

But no—“I am only a looker-on at Verona.” This is to express my conscientious obligation which I feel I owe to you for the pleasurable hours your paper has filled up in rousing me out of occasional fits of ennui. I would willingly repay the debt (not mention it), by suggesting to you more grist for the mill, for it must be wearing on your inventive faculties to ever get some new and timely topic for the instruction of your readers.

Tell us then about the characteristics, mental and artistic, of the great painters of the past. Give us the points of great pictures. What about colored statues—“it is a peg to hang a tale upon.” Are all critics honest?—“some men are better known than trusted,” says the old adage.

Once upon a time I said to myself: “It is the easiest thing in the world to write.” To revoke that vaporizing assertion I would in the spirit of compunction lay any reasonable penance upon myself, as for instance take an extra gin-ricky, or next winter rise an hour later than usual. It is no light-weight matter—authorship. Writing, like flying a kite, is easy enough, when the thoughts are up; but then the difficulty is the raising of them. It is the getting them on the wing—the launching of your subject.

Have I “greased the ways” by above topic suggestions? Or have I raised some thunderstorm in your sanctum by reason of my impertinence? But “small showers last long, but sudden storms are short;” so “let it thunder to the tune of green sleeves” (Shakespeare again, you see), and believe me

Always your well-wisher,
CHRIS. VAN DILLENWYN.

1232 16th Street, N. W.,
WASHINGTON, D. C., June 16, 1899.

DAVID C. PREYER, Esq., Editor and Publisher
THE COLLECTOR AND ART CRITIC.

Dear Sir:—“The Art Collector” of June 1st, 1899, contains one of the most amazing and absurdly false articles ever written by any intelligent person, or ever published in any respectable journal. It is a violent tirade against The Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, interspersed with strong adjectives and unwarranted reflections upon the management of that Institution. Of course every Gallery is open to *just* criticism, and such should be invited. In the Corcoran Gallery, like every other Gallery, there are, doubtless, mistakes, and certainly room for improvement, but the esteemed correspondent of “The Art Collector” has displayed the most absolute and consummate ignorance in overlooking the real “mistakes” and condemning the best class of work in the Gallery. Among other very questionable statements, the writer makes the most remarkable assertion that “The foreign French pictures are abominable, with hardly an exception.” Is it possible that the individual who made that statement could ever have visited the Corcoran Gallery? Is it possible, too, that the late William T. Walters, by whom or under whose advice most of the foreign paintings so roundly abused by the “Art Collector” were acquired, was wholly devoid of artistic taste or judgment?

In view of the fact that the Corcoran Gallery has on its walls such works, known the whole world over, by French Masters, as “The Wood Gatherers,” by Corot; “The Pond of the Great Oak,” by Dupré; “The Passing Regiment,” by Detaille; “The Vestal Tuccia,” by Le Roux; “The Helping Hand,” by Emile Renouf; “The Breton Widow,” by Jules Breton, and innumerable other fine examples by such French painters as Troyon, Vibert, Van Marcke, Daubigny, Detaille, Cazin,—it is entirely within the bounds of reason to

suggest that the Editorial Staff of “The Art Collector” is in far more urgent need of improvement, and abounds more plentifully in “useless ignoramus,” than does The Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Respectfully,

C. POWELL MINNIGERODE.

In giving space to above communication I am only constrained by the axiom of justice: *audi alteram partem*. Not that I consider the tirade against all our prominent national museums, occurring in the issue referred to, at all worth noticing. The nauseous art criticisms appearing in the notorious “Town Topics,” which are written by the same pen, and which expose its ripping scurrility whenever it is dipped in the gall of its half-knowledge, are gladly passed unnoticed by every person of common sense. Who cares?

Art Notes.

THE other day I got again in hand that strangely gotten up booklet containing the Talks about Art which the late W. M. Hunt gave to his students. It is some twenty years or more that these wise, incisive remarks were taken down at odd times on scraps of paper or the backs of canvases by one who heard them, and yet I do not believe there is another, as practical, handbook and hintbook for the artist and student. The advantages of impulsive, unprepared teaching taken down from the teacher’s mouth are obvious; in reading such talks, we catch something of the life and influence of the voice. Drawbacks must be allowed for; the instruction of various pupils, and the correction of various faults, elicit sayings which seem, if they are not actually, contradictory; repetitions are scattered through the pages, and there is nothing of sequence or connection in the subjects treated. It is indeed no slight merit of such a collection of scraps that it should be even at this late day in any degree readable, and these talks are eminently so.

Mr. Hunt was a pupil of Couture, that great artist who is probably only known to most Americans as the painter of the “Romans of the Decadence” in the Luxembourg, but whose influence as a teacher of a distinctive method of painting, called technically “*frotté*,” has passed beyond the many pupils who year by year thronged his studio. Mr. Hunt not only studied under Couture, but he worked with Millet, whom he esteemed one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of modern masters, and with Corot, whom he keenly appreciated and loved. It is worthy of note that this American genius which bore in the purer forms of “transcendentalism” so fine a “flower of the mind,” had a perfect affinity with the genius of the spiritual Corot. It is therefore the best teaching, the best traditions, the best principles of art that Mr. Hunt brought to his pupils.

His great basal thought was his insistence on the rendering of values, following the example of the great Dutch masters. He says: “If you represent values faithfully you will have the picture;” “I started with the idea of drawing by representing values, and I have stuck to it ever since.” The student who has hardly heard the word will find in Mr. Hunt’s chat not only energetic precept, but a practical lesson on the subject, which will serve him almost as well as though he were at the easel of the master. The important principle that values are dependent on relations—*i. e.*, that they may be as truthfully preserved in a light as in a dark toned picture—is thus well expressed: “You spread your fingers over the keys of a piano and strike a chord. If too high or too low, you need not try again, but play on in that key. So in painting. Remembering that it is easier to transpose in painting than in music.”

To pass to another matter, secondary only in gravity to this, and more readily intelligible to the lay reader, crisp and elegant drawing is a desideratum. Many favor a certain roundness and bluntness, not of form but of handling. This is a distinction which is observable not in art only, but in every kind of decorative work. The teacher alludes to this, speaking of the roundness of the forms of a particular model who was at the moment the subject of study, and he says: “Seek for an opposite, and find all the straight lines and sharp angles. In that way vitalize your work! Look for the round! but look for the square within the round! Chop it out with an axe, and sand-paper it afterwards.” This is a way of drawing which would not only “vitalise” the work, but would give it a *graceful* vitality, a *nettelé* which is in drawing what a charming manner of handling the paint is in painting. Remember for instance the angular pupils, and the angular lights in them, of the eyes in Sir Joshua Reynolds’s portraits.

Some of the best sayings in this little volume refer to the desirability in a painter of that simplicity of eye which is the only simplicity which can and must be learnt. Intelligent simplicity seems indeed to be the attitude which the learner of the art and handicraft of